**Building Momentum**

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After understanding the environment that you will be involved in, whether it be a college context or otherwise, and its implications for building an activist network, it is now important to get to work tangibly building momentum.

The most common time to build momentum is at the start of a fall semester when new students are eager to join organizations and there is remaining excitement from any summer protest activity or possible whirlwinds (see Overview of Theory and Strategy). Many students might be returning from internships or summer jobs with knowledge, skills, and experiences that can make a movement more effective, while others may have continued their activist work during the summer. Seizing on the enthusiasm of the summer is important because this is when students are most likely to be active—wait several months, and the combined load of schoolwork, job requirements, family obligations, and colder weather may make it more difficult to mobilize people for larger demonstrations. By organizing right as summer ends, the process of building momentum can feel more like “hitting the ground running.” However, see this as an opportunity! Use organizations as a continuation of previous whirlwinds or moments of higher activism to seize institutional space, and in doing so connect interested people and seize social space. This process can take the form of four steps for “rebooting,” as follows.

First, it is efficient to use existing infrastructure. To this end, it is important to work with existing organizations and build coalitions with existing social movement groups. By not starting entirely from scratch, you’ll avoid many collective action problems associated with coordinating meetings, deciding organization structure, negotiating common goals, and setting up events (see Student Org Collaboration/Coalition Building). If the summer included a period of heightened activism, there might be many different organizations that will need to be coordinated and/or consolidated in the process of institutionalizing recent gains. There are also several opportunities for recruitment after such a period, with many 3rd and 4th year students more likely to be mobilized for the movement.

Second, maintain enthusiasm! As organizations institutionalize the efforts of the most recent whirlwind or simply build on previous progress, it is important to continue organizing events to maintain dialogue on the issues affecting the movement. At the individual level, smiles and celebratory attitudes go a long way to show that the effort is worth it and that the new relationships being formed are worth investing in. Moreover, in line with Frances Fox Piven’s model of mass mobilization, it is important to keep the public aware of the movement’s presence and goals, so as to maximize mobilization in a whirlwind event. As described in the College as a Context section, various pressures prevent students from engaging in persistent disruptive behavior. It can be exhausting and demanding to organize protests or other demonstrations without any apparent local results. As a result, we recommend that social movement groups curate a “menu” of tactics that require different levels of involvement, such that busier students can still participate while more ambitious members can pursue larger projects (see Tactics).

Third, revisit the old organization structures, objectives, methods, and criteria for success, and work through a full re-evaluation of the movement’s current trajectory and goals. Are the goals appropriate? Is the movement making progress towards achieving them? What is working and what is not? The self-evaluation is crucial to understanding the lessons from previous efforts and learning what works and what does not. It is possible that organizational-level change might be needed, or the entire goals of the movement might have to change. Depending on your position as an individual in each movement group and the position of the group/organization in the movement as a whole, these changes might be easy to do or require a broader dialogue; but on the whole, the re-evaluation process is a collective discussion and should be inclusive of as many voices in the movement as possible (including those outside the organization one may belong to). To this point, activist Peter Gelderloos makes a valid critique that social movements often restrict themselves to formal structures and exclusive models of organization that prevent a truly popular participation. Therefore, it is important that social movements be inclusive in their evaluations and incorporate a variety of voices so as to not be limited in their capabilities.

Finally, build an *affective* community of mutual support. As discussed in the College as a Context section, this model is especially applicable at college campuses and school settings, where there is rapid succession of leaders and a strong group resilience is necessary. By forming a common identity and uniting around shared ideas and open discussions, a closer community forms that can take away feelings of isolation, alienation, and individual responsibility. Instead, a collective responsibility emerges, such that the movement group is better able to persist through challenges. Both formal and informal mentorship settings, including bonding between students of same and different ages, create a sense of inheritance within the organization and make the lessons of previous efforts clear. As a result, a culture of activism develops where each person is contributing something to the group as a whole, and through the acceptance of each person’s contributions, the movement is continually reinvented in a more effective form.

Building momentum is not as simple as four steps. For sure, organizations at different stages of development and membership will go through different processes of recruitment and self-evaluation; and decentralized mass movements must also deal with varying understandings of *who* and *what* the movement is. In any case, by maintaining a healthy evolution and strong but expanding community, movements can gain traction in popular spaces in which to affect real change.